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AUTHOR Dunn, Douglas; Hogg, David H.

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ABSTRACT

The key to marketing a town is determining and promoting the town's "differential advantage" or uniqueness that would make people want to visit or live there. Exercises to help communities gain important insights into the town's competitive edge include a brainstorming session with knowledgeable community members, a visitor questionnaire, a photography contest to provide photographs for promotional literature, interviews with local businesses, focus groups, a school essay contest on "What I Believe Is Unique about My Town," and input from a team of visiting professionals. Once a town establishes its differential advantage, it must successfully promote this uniqueness to prospective customers. Community marketers have four distinct promotional areas to use in the creation of a promotional mix. These are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and publicity. In the case of Willcox, Arizona, the Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture took positive, aggressive steps to stimulate business in the area. They discovered through a visitor questionnaire that many of the tourists visiting and staying in Willcox were from rural areas in the Midwest with a rural farm interest. In response, the Chamber ran an ad in a midwestern farm magazine, developed a self-guided tour of area farms and ranches, and compiled a packet of information for tourists. (KS)

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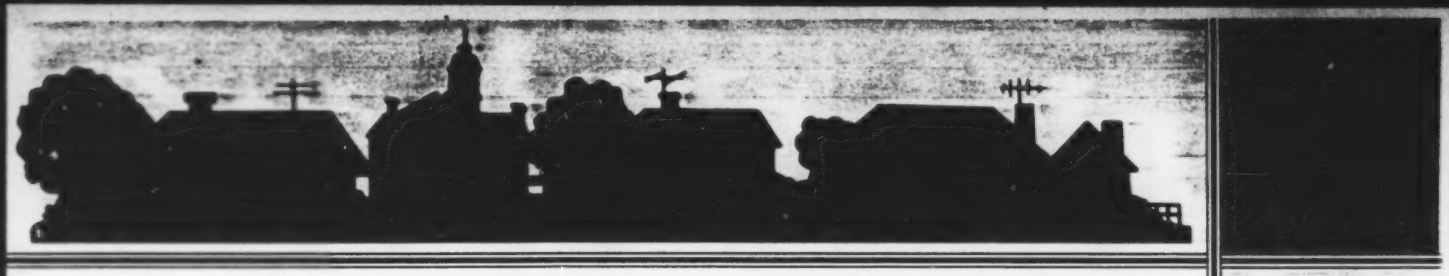

ED 384 453

Marketing the Uniqueness of Small Towns

In recent decades, rural-urban migration has begun to reverse itself. People are moving back to small communities in increasing numbers. Some communities have capitalized on this national trend, others have not.

The science of marketing can be applied to communities. Small towns can strengthen their local economy by identifying the town's "uniqueness" and then capitalizing on it. There are seven simple techniques that help residents of a small town identify and market what is unique about their community.

The story of Willcox, Arizona is one example of successful marketing.

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Douglas Dunn
Extension Agent
Community and Leadership Development
Arizona Cooperative Extension

and David H. Hogg
Graduate Student
Department of Marketing
University of Arizona

A publication of the
Western Rural Development Center
Oregon State University
Ballard Extension Hall 307
Corvallis, OR 97331-3607
(503) 737-3621 • FAX (503) 737-1579
WRDC@CCMAIL.ORST.EDU
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MARKETING A COMMUNITY

Marketing is a young but rapidly growing field. As recently as the 1950s, there was no established definition of marketing, though many managers were beginning to see the importance of what advocates of this new field were teaching. Large companies began to restructure their organizational charts to include marketing divisions. The title *marketing manager* came into use. Over the past twenty years, the field of marketing has developed rapidly to become one of the most important areas of modern business activity.

Recently, creative managers have begun to apply modern marketing techniques to the nonprofit sector. The definition of marketing given by the American Marketing Association is "the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer." Hospital directors, museum managers, political campaign managers and college presidents are all realizing that they are in the marketing business. Hospital directors market health care. Museum managers market historical education and nostalgia. Political campaign managers market their candidates. College presidents market education. Likewise, community leaders must recognize that they, too, are engaged in a marketing enterprise—that of marketing their towns to prospective "customers" who could make use of what the town, its people, and its businesses have to offer.

THE DIFFERENTIAL ADVANTAGE

The most important realization for any marketer is that potential customers are usually faced with a wide range of alternative products, all very similar to each other. It is the marketer's job to create in the customer's mind an idea that "my product is unique from all the others in an important way "so that the product will have a competitive edge over others in the marketplace. This "uniqueness" or "competitive edge" is what is known in the marketing field as a differential advantage.

In the context of community development, it is the community leaders' (marketer's) job to persuade potential tourists, residents, and outside businesses (customers) that your town is unique (has a differential advantage) in a way that could be important to them in their decision about where to visit or where to locate. This creation of a differential advantage could turn out to be the deciding factor for a family that is considering where to spend their next vacation. It could influence a family who is thinking of moving to another community or it could steer a business to locate in your town over other towns which don't appear to have anything unique to offer. In cases where other towns may offer similar features, if community leaders have created a differential advantage in the potential customer's mind, your town will likely win out.

All marketing activities are designed to create and nurture a differential advantage. This centers around the four "P's" of the marketing mix—Product, Place, Price and Promotion.

In marketing a town, the various features of the town itself become the product. The concept of the town as a product encompasses the town's scenery, natural resources, friendly atmosphere, transportation routes, history, architecture, educational facilities, shopping areas and much more. All of these aspects help to determine the individual character of a given town. Often, some of these features will be unique to that town alone, but they can sometimes characterize an area of the country as well. The most common example given for towns in the southwestern United States is the excellent climate. This feature helps to make towns in the Southwest unique from those in other parts of the country.

Place refers to the physical channel through which a product is sold, for example, a grocery store or a lumber company. For some marketers, selection of the outlet through which the product will be sold can have a major impact upon the ultimate success or failure of the product in the marketplace.

When we speak of the next element of a community's marketing mix, price, we are really referring to costs that the community imposes upon residents, tourists, and resident businesses for the privilege of carrying out activities in the town—cost of living, taxes, transportation costs, value of real estate, etc. Often, small towns have distinct price advantages over other locations. These price advantages can become an integral part of a town's marketable uniqueness.

Finally, differential advantages of product and price must be promoted effectively. Essentially, promotion is communication. Community leaders must communicate the message of their town's uniqueness to prospective customers. Reaching the right audience for the town's message is often the most difficult task its marketers face, because promotion costs money and most small towns are constrained by a tight promotional budget. But a low-cost promotion program can be effective if it is well conceived.

In review, community leaders are engaged in marketing a complex product—their town. Principles of marketing tell us that community marketers should develop and nurture a "differential advantage" for their product, based on the uniqueness of the product itself and/or the price of the product. This differential advantage must then be promoted to a target audience efficiently, within applicable budget constraints. Though the steps in developing and carrying out a marketing plan can be time-consuming, they can pay off in the form of a broadened economic base for the community.

IDENTIFYING YOUR TOWN'S DIFFERENTIAL ADVANTAGE

Your town's competitive edge is a composite of all of the factors that make the town unique. Too often towns try to be successful by copying marketing strategies that have worked for others, only to find that the program they stole doesn't work as well as they thought it would.

Each town is unique and what works for one will not necessarily work for another. As a basis for your town's marketing program, community leaders must identify and capitalize upon the town's special features. These may be the presence of a valuable natural resource such as rich farm land or thermo-wells, or the community may have a strategic location for serving a given population. It may have scenic beauty, historical significance, a famous native son, a pleasant climate, pleasing architecture, or a combination of these and other values.

Often those who live and work in the community lose sight of their community's uniqueness, or they take it for granted. They can't see the forest for the trees. This is nothing to be ashamed of; it is a problem that plagues nearly all marketers from time to time. But it can be cured.

To bring your town's uniqueness into focus, you need to solicit information from many different sources: residents, newcomers, visitors and others. Each group can offer a different perspective, and each perspective can contribute to building your town's differential advantage.

Too often community leaders assume that they already know what is unique and marketable about their town. They typically don't take the time to test these assumptions with their town's customers, and when they do, it is done in a very unscientific manner, e.g., "a couple from Michigan stopped in here last month and they said..."

Many of us overlook the fact that the overall uniqueness of a community is usually the result of a combination of little things rather than one or two big things.

In identifying a community's uniqueness, be specific and be realistic. Vague generalities and intangible adjectives are of limited value. Remember, uniqueness lies in the eye of the beholder. What is beautiful to one person may be boring and unexciting to another. Consensus is not necessary.

The following exercises are designed to help communities gain important insights in the development of a town's competitive edge. Any of these exercises will help you develop a solid marketing program for your town. Naturally, the more of these projects your town can do, the more it will be able to sharpen its competitive edge. If you have questions or if you need assistance regarding these exercises, contact your county Cooperative Extension office.

Brainstorming session

The most basic method of zeroing in on your town's differential advantage is a brainstorming session involving people you consider to be knowledgeable community members. The session can be held at any convenient time and location. It will be more beneficial if you choose a diversified cross section of the community so that dissenting and diverse viewpoints can be brought into the discussion. It is equally important that there be a group facilitator chosen in advance to steer the session when it gets off the track.

The brainstorming session should be designed to find out what the participants feel is unique about the town. Plan to have the session take at least an hour. (These sessions tend to run more smoothly when refreshments are provided.) Appoint someone to record the ideas on sheets of newsprint or a blackboard as they are presented. Review these ideas after the session is over to decide which are the most promising. Be sure to thank all participants.

Adherence to the basic rules of brainstorming is essential to an enjoyable, successful experience. The facilitator's first responsibility is the orientation of the brainstorming group. After everyone has been introduced and refreshments have been served, explain that the group is gathered to brainstorm the uniqueness of the town and that the group's ideas will be used in the development of a marketing package for the town. The assignment to the group might be: "In your opinion, what makes this community unique? In other words, what do you particularly like about this community?" Keep the brainstorming going by asking questions such as "what else is special about this community?"

Brainstorming rules are fairly simple. They are:

1. List every idea anyone has.
2. Do not discuss ideas.
3. Do not judge ideas.
4. Do not worry about repetition.
5. Do not worry about spelling as ideas are recorded.

These rules must be strictly followed so that no potentially good ideas will be held back by any of the participants. Participants are encouraged to build on the ideas of others, but any debate is to be discouraged. The difficulty of the facilitator's job lies not in acquainting participants with these mandatory guidelines, but in enforcing them as the exercise continues.

After a list of unique characteristics has been developed, the facilitator may wish to challenge the group to be more specific, e.g., "give me examples of what you mean by 'friendly people'?" "Please be more specific about 'good climate'."

"How does this community differ from other small communities 'as a great place to raise kids'?"

The end result of your brainstorming session should be a usable list of unique, marketable community characteristics. It is these characteristics, along with other unique aspects of the town uncovered through some combination of the following six exercises, that should be stressed in promotions directed to outsiders. If this uniqueness is properly communicated, the town will be creating for itself a true competitive edge.

Visitor questionnaire

It is also important to find out what visitors believe is unique about the town. This insight can be a valuable aid in the development of the town's competitive edge, and can be gained relatively inexpensively.

A properly designed questionnaire takes only minutes to complete and can yield some valuable information.

Most towns have a location where visitors can come to ask questions and get information about the area. Usually, this is a visitor center or Chamber of Commerce office. Most who visit these centers are there to gain information, but smart community leaders can balance this exchange by asking visitors for some data in the form of a brief questionnaire. A properly designed questionnaire takes only minutes to complete and can yield some valuable information.

First, the questionnaire should find out the visitor's place of residence. Name and address should be optional since this is personal information, but it is important that the respondents list their home town and state. With this information, community marketers can pinpoint those areas which now contribute a heavy concentration of town visitors. These areas can become prime targets for promotional activity.

Secondly, the questionnaire should ask, "What brings you to (town)?" This can be coupled with the questions "What is the destination of your trip?" and "You are here on business/pleasure (circle one)." These questions should yield a brief profile of what brings visitors into the community. If enough of the questionnaires show similar responses of one type or another, this can provide valuable insight into certain approaches for the promotional campaign. For example, if you were to find that many visitors were passing through your town on the way from New Mexico to California vacation spots, you would look for a promotional medium that would be read by prospective vacationers from New Mexico and you would adjust the promotional message to appeal to that audience.

Another question that should be included is, "What have you particularly noticed that you like about (town)?" This question will draw a variety of responses. If a pattern develops such as "good road service" or "lots of historical sites" or "that big cactus on the road into town," then you will be armed with a feature of the community that is, in the opinion of outsiders, unique and marketable.

It is easy to add more questions if you feel they are necessary, but remember, the more questions on the form, the more likely it is that respondents will leave blanks or refuse to answer the questionnaire at all. Keep it short. One side of an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper is least intimidating, and can be quite effective.

These questionnaires will be absolutely useless, however, unless someone takes the time to go through them and compile the information they contain.

If you don't believe questionnaires will ever be read, then use a guest registry instead. Such a registry is a good source of location information. The easiest way to compile location information is with a map and pins. This will give a visual display of the results. Whatever method you use, something along these lines should be instituted. It is a good, inexpensive source of valuable marketing information.

It is particularly helpful to get reactions from visitors about which promotional channels have been effective, e.g. "What made you decide to visit this area?" You may want to expand your efforts through these channels. For example, if a visitor found out about the community in an article or advertisement published in a particular city or media, then the town should try even harder to get similar coverage in the future. These interviews can uncover marketing strategies that have already been proven to work for your town.

Photography contest

The best way for out-of-towners to see unique scenery and architecture is through photographs. Pictures comprise an integral part of any good promotional presentation, but good pictures of interesting sights around town can be hard to come by.

...competition can actually become a community morale booster.

Nearly everybody in town will have a different idea of what particular feature is interesting and unique. Through a well-publicized photography contest these individual perspectives can be recorded. Some of the pictures may be a surprise. Anybody with a camera is capable of taking good shots.

The purpose of such a contest is two-fold. obviously, the contest will provide a number of quality photographs for use in the town's promotional literature. But just as important, it can be an inexpensive way to get residents thinking about their town again; the competition can actually become a community morale booster.

Rules: Usually, such a contest is sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, though other groups could undertake it. It is important that these groups communicate with each other to avoid wasteful, confusing, and possibly disastrous duplication of efforts on such a project. The coordinating body must have an address where entries can be sent and must have at least one volunteer or employee who is willing to keep track of entries as they come in.

Specific rules are up to the contest coordinators, but the contest will run more smoothly if these few simple guidelines are followed.

- Announcement must inform contestants that all entries will become the sole property of the coordinating body and will be used in promotional literature and in other promotional activities.
- Contest rules should stipulate, in detail, how entries must be submitted and to what address. State whether entries should be color or black/white or either. (This will, of course, depend upon whether or not color photographs will be used in the brochure. Color reproduction can be expensive.) Also outline what size entries must be. Any size 8" x 10" or smaller is workable, but it is helpful and more fair if all prints are the same size. All entries should include a brief description of when and where the photo was taken (in addition to the entrant's name, address and phone number). Encourage multiple entries.
- Set a beginning date and an ending date for the contest. Give people plenty of time to have film developed, duplicates made, etc., but don't let it drag out for so long that it loses momentum. Six weeks should be a comfortable time limit.
- Inform contestants about how their pictures will be judged. Most contests judge entries on quality and on subject matter. In this case the subject matter should be "scenes, faces, and activities that are unique to our town."
- Entries should be judged in at least two (preferably three) categories. So that amateurs will not be discouraged, amateur entries should be judged separately from entries sent in by professional photographers. In a small town, there may be only a couple of professional entries (consequently all professionals may

win a prize), but these contributions are worth special consideration because they are often among the best of the contest. To encourage participation by younger citizens, some communities may also want to include a junior category for those 16 years and under.

- The rules must state that the decision of the judges will be final. This will avoid unnecessary headaches after the contest is over.

Promotion: The contest should be promoted as widely as possible, at the least possible cost. Here are some suggestions:

- Newspaper Publicity. Such a contest can often be a newsworthy item. Ask the local newspaper to run a detailed press release. If they balk at this, then send them a brief release, but get it in the paper for free.
- Radio/TV Publicity. Local stations are often willing to announce such items for no charge, either as news, or as a public service message. This is a great way to let people know about the contest.
- Ask the local media to be co-sponsors of the contest.
- Posters. Handbill-sized posters can be printed for a nominal charge. Such posters can include contest details and can usually be posted in stores and other conspicuous spots around town.
- Schools. Coordinators can speak with local school officials to have the contest announced in the school as an opportunity for students. This should only be attempted if there is a junior division included in the contest.

Judges: Judges should be chosen before the contest begins. The judging panel should consist mainly of those responsible for marketing the town. The basic selection criteria are impartiality and an understanding of the contest's purpose. Judges and their families may not enter.

Prizes: Prizes should consist of recognition and monetary rewards (if possible). The following guidelines may be helpful:

- Recognition. Trophies or plaques should be offered for first, second and third place winners in each division. These can be small and relatively inexpensive, but they should have the name and date of the contest inscribed on them. (Note: Winners of the professional division will probably prefer plaques to hang in their places of business.)
- Credits. The photographer should be credited for all photos used in promotional material.
- Money. Monetary rewards need not be expensive. Check with local merchants to see if they would be willing to donate gift certificates as prizes. If no donors can be found, remember that U.S. Savings Bonds can be purchased for less than face value, and they make good, patriotic prizes.

Using the photos: When the contest is over, the sponsoring organization should have a good selection of usable photographs of unique aspects of the local community that they can be put to use in a number of ways:

- Use the pictures as illustrations in any promotional brochure, flyer, etc., that is published for distribution to the town's prospective customers.
- Stage an art show or make a montage of the photos and display them at the local Visitor Center, the Chamber of Commerce or some other location where visitors and residents will be likely to see them. Photographs are the best way for visitors to become acquainted with the town in a very short time
- Create community awareness by inserting one of the photos in your local newspaper each week, or create a centerfold supplement of all the photographs. Papers will sometimes run such a supplement free in the community

interest, but you will probably have to find advertisers to sponsor the insert. Finding sponsors can take some effort, but advertisers are often happy for the good exposure and public relations that come from participating in such a project. Arrangements should be made with the newspaper to run additional copies of the supplement for later promotional use.

- Develop a slide presentation from the photographs. Slide shows (with narration, of course) can be presented to service clubs and civic organizations to help rekindle interest in the community. If the program is well received, you might consider showing it in neighboring cities (or wherever your customers are coming from) to help to get outsiders interested in your community. Almost any photo finisher can help you make slides from your snapshots. If the contest photos are black and white, you might consider having a photographer re-shoot the scenes on color slide film. Slide shows need at least some color for impact.
- Use your winning photo(s) for a "Visit (your town) poster." These posters, if done in black and white, are generally inexpensive to produce, but they can provide excellent exposure for your community when hung in offices, tourist locations and travel agencies.
- Develop a town tour brochure with pictures that are submitted. Pictures can be supplemented with explanations and a map showing locations of the various points of interest. A small brochure of this sort is not very expensive to produce and it can be a big help to visitors who wish to familiarize themselves with your community.

...a business visitation team...is an opportunity to pick up some valuable marketing information

Interview local businesses

For those towns that want to promote expansion by attracting new businesses, this exercise is a must. Organize a business visitation team to systematically visit local businesses, especially new businesses in the community. If your group is not doing this already, it is certainly denying itself an opportunity to pick up some valuable marketing information as well as help your present businesses. In this initial contact, no effort should be made to solicit membership in the Chamber of Commerce or other organizations. This will detract from the interview.

The in-depth interview entails broad, probing questions designed to gather pertinent information on the strengths and weaknesses of the community as a business location. With newcomers, determine: 1) How the business person found out about the town and 2) Why the person decided to move his/her business into the town.

Before initiating the interview, assure the respondent that all information received will be treated confidentially and that you are merely trying to get a general idea of how to improve the town's marketing strategies. A straightforward, "What is your overall opinion of this community as a place to do business?" will do nicely to get you started. After the subject stops talking, the interviewer should probe further with questions like, "What are the best features of this community as a business location?" and "What are the worst features of this community as a business location?" "What are the areas of greatest concern to you and your business at this time?" "What made you decide to move your business here, rather than somewhere else?" These questions can be followed up with further probing questions until the interviewer is satisfied with the detail of the answer. The entire interview process should take fifteen to thirty minutes.

Ideally, the interviews should be tape recorded and transcribed later. The tape recorder should be introduced casually so that your respondent will not become

flustered or apprehensive. Respondents talk much faster than you can probably write. The thoughts you miss while writing may turn out to be important later on, even if they seemed to be trivial during the interview. If the interview cannot be recorded, it is essential that the interviewer take notes while the subject is talking. Since most people don't know shorthand, the notes will be sketchy at best. Details should be "fleshed in" by the interviewer as soon as possible after the interview, while the information is still fresh in your mind. After a few such interviews have been done, the results should be compared to find similarities. If certain statements show up repeatedly, community leaders will be armed with some valuable information (that cost them nothing to acquire) that will help them to make their town's future marketing plans even more effective.

Your community might consider participating in the Business Retention and Expansion Program which is available through Cooperative Extension in most states. The objectives of the program are to recognize the contribution of local businesses and to support and assist them in their development plans. A business visitation team training guide, sample questions and organizational I assistance is available through your local Extension office.

Focus groups can gather ideas from townspeople in an environment of free discussion.

Focus groups

Focus groups are basically group interview/discussion sessions, run by a trained, professional interviewer who attempts to "focus" group discussion on a specific topic. For small town marketers, focus groups could help to bring up and evaluate new ideas about the town itself through intensive interaction among eight to twelve individuals. Such sessions could also be used to uncover marketable aspects of the town's uniqueness that would not otherwise have surfaced.

Focus groups can be important because they gather ideas from typical townspeople in an environment of free discussion. Because of the flexibility of these groups, they can probe various subjects as they arise, even subjects that weren't considered to be important before the discussion started. Because of the interaction of participants, the focus groups uncover more detail than individual interviews.

The group must be run by someone who has experience with focus group interviews. A discussion run by an untrained moderator will likely be no more than an interesting (or perhaps chaotic) coffee klatch that yields little or no usable information. Likewise, improper makeup of the group (a poor cross-section or one participant who dominates) can drastically affect the results.

The interview, which should last an hour, is tape recorded and transcribed later. This allows the interviewer to reflect on every detail of the group discussion and it provides the town with a detailed summary of participants' key statements. Participants should be informed that community leaders will only see the transcript, not hear the tape, and that no names will be used. The tape itself will become the property of the interviewer, who will be responsible for protecting the anonymity of the participants.

If your town decides that it would like to conduct a focus group, there are two sources to contact for help: First, you could contact a marketing research firm or an advertising agency that has the expertise to conduct focus group interviews. (Remember that not all such firms can offer this service.) It would be helpful to get a list of customers for whom the company has conducted focus groups in the past and call these customers. Choose a firm only after you establish that they have performed satisfactorily in the past. As a less expensive alternative, you can make use of your local Cooperative Extension office.

School essay contest

Another inexpensive method of uncovering your town's differential advantage is a school essay contest. Such a contest is most easily run if the community has its own school, but with proper coordination it can also be run in a school that serves young people from several different communities. Contact school officials to determine the feasibility of such a contest. The contest should be announced in English classes as an assignment (optional or otherwise) to write a 200 word essay on "What I Believe is Unique About My Town." All age groups should be encouraged to participate.

When the papers are handed in, they should first be graded by the English teachers for style, grammar, etc., and then sent to the sponsoring organization for judging. Essays should be judged on uniqueness of the content; and papers can be divided by grade level if desired.

At an assembly of the student body, winners should be recognized by representatives of the community with prizes. Scholarships or savings bonds make excellent prizes, but they should be given in addition to, not instead of, small plaques or trophies.

The essay contest would be healthy competition for the students, and would help the town's marketers sharpen their differential advantage by acquiring yet another perspective on what is unique about their town.

...."visiting professionals" can give you information you might not get rom any other source.

Professional visitation

Those who live in and drive through your town can provide you with some insight into its differential advantage, but a "team of visiting professionals" can give you information you might not get from any other source.

Your Cooperative Extension office is in contact with university and other resources that you might put to work for your town. Through your Extension agent you might arrange for an urban planner, a geographer, a historian, a marketer, a business executive, a representative of your state's economic development office, and/or other types of professionals from out of town to visit your community and report on their observations. The visit is not difficult to arrange. The outsiders can come to town in the morning and can be given a guided tour for orientation purposes. They need to know what you believe is important about your town. The tour can finish with lunch at a local restaurant. At lunch, the visitors will have an opportunity to ask questions and talk with community leaders about the town. After lunch, the professionals should be free to look around on their own to become as familiar as possible with your community. Some of them may wish to arrange special interviews with representative businessmen, utility manager, city officials, industrial development authority, the planning commission, etc., for more in-depth questioning in their specialty areas.

The professionals will have been instructed to write summary reports describing what they liked about your community and what they believe to be the marketable uniqueness of your town. They will also be invited to comment on any conditions that they feel need improvement. This is all valuable marketing information and it can be obtained for a relatively modest cost. It is a good opportunity for you to get input on what your town is doing right, what it may be doing wrong, and where it could improve. Take advantage of it.

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[1]Two references are: Goldman, Alfred E., "The Group Depth Interview," *Journal of Marketing*, 26:61-68, July 1962. Hansen, Louie, and Richard Maxon, "The Group Depth Interview in Extension Programming," Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University. 22

PROMOTION

Once a town has established its differential advantage, it must successfully promote this uniqueness to prospective customers if it is to have any effect. Community marketers have four distinct promotional areas to utilize in the creation of a promotional mix. These are advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and publicity.

Advertising

Advertising is the promotional medium that communities use most often. It includes paid presentations in brochures, trade publications, magazines and newspapers, billboards and other advertising media. With the information gained on the community's uniqueness and its potential customers through the exercises outlined in this bulletin, the community can fine tune its advertising to make it more efficient than it may have been before.

For example, let's say that a town is trying to attract tourist trade. Its visitor questionnaire has revealed that many of the town's guests are vacationers from large cities in the same state who are enroute to a nearby resort area. This would suggest that the town buy ads in advertising media that will be seen by these prospective customers.

There are many advertising alternatives available. Use common sense in deciding how to spend your advertising dollar so that it will communicate your message (uniqueness) to prospective customers (identified through your market research) as efficiently as possible.

Personal selling

The next element of the promotional mix, personal selling, consists of verbal conversation with prospective customers. Residents are using personal selling every time they speak with others about their town. It is important for community leaders to realize that employees in contact with the public must conduct themselves as the town's sales representatives, because that is really what they are.

Another type of personal selling happens away from home. For example, if your town were to find (through interviewing incoming business people) that it had the ideal conditions and labor force necessary to support electrical assembly operations, it could seek out a trade association serving this industry. Since most such organizations hold conventions, it might be possible for the town to rent a small booth in a trade mall at the association's next convention. If community sales people were armed with good sales presentations, their personal selling efforts at the convention could pay off. Likewise, a weekend booth at a shopping center in one of the larger cities in the state may be effective in attracting in-state visitors to your town.

Sales promotion

The third element of the promotional mix is called sales promotion. It consists of coupons, trading stamps, balloons, bumper stickers, free entertainment and other promotional items paid for by the marketer. Many towns already use some form of sales promotion, but these are often not well planned. Many communities hastily jump into a general advertising and promotion campaign (i.e., "Buy At Home") before they have first identified and developed tangible, "unique" marketable products and before they have identified their best prospects (potential customers).

When deciding to use a sales promotion, ask yourself these two questions: "Will this promotion reach my targeted customers?", and "Will it make a lasting

impression on them, or will it soon be thrown away and forgotten?" There is no specific formula for promotional success, but if you screen your activities this way, you will probably eliminate most unwise sales promotions before they become unwise expenditures.

Publicity

The final element of the promotional mix is publicity. It differs from the first three elements in one very important way—it is free. For small towns with small budgets, publicity can be an effective way to reach prospective customers who could never be reached through paid promotion.

Publicity usually materializes when some event or characteristic of a town becomes newsworthy in the eyes of the radio, television, magazine, or newspaper media. Smart marketers know that many news stories exist only because someone put forth the effort to make them newsworthy. This is usually done in the form of a press release or an article/story written for the media by those who could benefit from its publication (in this case, your town). But the story won't be run if nobody writes it

Whoever is in charge of a town's promotions should become thoroughly familiar with proper news release writing techniques. This can be done easily by consulting a book on the subject at the library or your local newspaper editor. Remember, publicity is an inexpensive, effective way of spreading your town's message, but good publicity requires good management. Make sure your town has an effective publicity program to take advantage of the least expensive element of your promotional mix.

Most towns know that promotion is essential for growth to occur. By knowing who your customers are and the unique features of your town, you can design a promotional message with a far greater impact than one designed on gut feelings or guesswork. By using all four elements of the promotional mix to push your differential advantage, your town will be assured of running the most successful marketing campaign possible. The economic potential of a community's uniqueness is lost if it is not recognized by the people living there, or if it is not professionally developed or wisely preserved.

IT WORKS: THE CASE OF WILLCOX, ARIZONA

The Willcox Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture knew that they had to take some positive, aggressive steps to stimulate business in the Willcox, Arizona area. Their final decision turned out to be not only creative but also successful.

Using a technique similar to the "Visitor Questionnaire" described earlier, the Willcox Chamber discovered that many of the tourists visiting and staying in Willcox were from rural areas in the Midwest. These visitors felt Willcox was unique because it closely resembled a midwest farming town, but was located in Arizona's mild climate. Chamber Manager Ellen Clark explains, "We found that over half the visitors stopping at the Chamber office for information have a rural farm interest or background. They are the ones the area really seems to appeal to."

In response to this information, the Chamber decided to concentrate its limited tourism budget on promoting Willcox to rural residents of the Midwest. Chamber tourism chairman Dick Seidel proposed a "Spend a Fun 'Farmer's Holiday' in Sunny Arizona" ad that was run in a midwest farm magazine. The ad was jointly sponsored by the Willcox Chamber of Commerce and the State Department of Tourism.

To aid the visitors when they arrive, the Chamber developed a self-guided tour of area farms and ranches and a brief fact sheet on the economics of local agriculture. The key to this effort, summarizes Seidel, is that "We've decided to target our advertising rather than use the shotgun approach."

To supplement this advertising, the Chamber has developed a "Stay a Day in Willcox" packet that tourists can pick up at various locations around town. It is actually a folder with pockets containing single-page backgrounds on historical sites and descriptions of scenic areas, along with good directions explaining how newcomers can visit these areas of interest. A biographic sketch of favorite son, Rex Allen, is included, along with directions to the Rex Allen museum. The packet contains maps of Willcox and the surrounding area and self guided tours of the Willcox area that tourists staying in Willcox can complete in one day.

Expensive, you say? The packet is financed entirely by advertising on the folder. "We have found that the packet is less expensive than a color brochure and is much more effective," explained Clark. "It gives much more information on the area, and individual sheets can be pulled or added in tailoring the packet to the individual tourist's needs. Visitors freely write on and use the packet, whereas I find people tend to be afraid of slick brochures."

By identifying its differential advantage and the needs of its customers, Willcox, Arizona has now begun to benefit from its marketing efforts. These activities take time, effort and money, but they can result in better efficiency and a greater economic reward for the entire community.

Welcome to Willcox
Visitor Registry

We are very pleased that you have decided to visit Willcox. We wish to do all we can to make your visit a pleasant one. Please provide us with the following information that we might continue to do a better job at serving our visitors.

1. Your name (optional): _____
2. Your city and state of residence: _____
3. What made you decide to visit Willcox? _____

_____

4. What is the final destination of your trip? _____
5. What have you particularly liked about the Willcox area? _____
6. What could we have done to make your stay more pleasant? _____

_____

Thank you

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Marketing the Uniqueness of Small Towns

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